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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on one Nova Scotian community's efforts to maintain its school's existence in the face of service centralization. The paper focuses on the community's efforts to save the school from downsizing or closure. In spring 1994, the Nova Scotia government passed legislation allowing for the creation of school councils. Subsequently, a study was undertaken to analyze the site-based management districts that were set up because of this legislation. The text analyzes the Sannox Consolidated School district, a rural community in Nova Scotia. The efforts to increase parent participation in the governance of the school and the attendant tensions that developed between parents and teachers due to that involvement are discussed. The parents' new role is described in three stages: the increasing awareness by parents and teachers of their new place in the system, the cautious cooperation that evolved following this awareness, and the shared commitment to improve the school and preserve it as a community resource once these new roles were understood. (RJM)

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Parental Involvement and Governance:
The reconstruction of the "community school"

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> I feel that the school is our community and if we lose that, we don't have a community anymore. And all these little rural communities, I think they will suffer if we lose any one of those schools. [ERM27-9]
>
> A parent from the community of Sannox[1]

The tripartite relationship among schools, family and church bounded by a common sense of community has changed dramatically in the last four decades such that the traditional lines of influence and understanding have shifted. In the process, the support that these institutions formerly gave to each other has changed in degree and substance, with the school no longer able to rely on the support from either the home or the church in the education process (Goodlad 1984). Possible causes for these developments may be found in shifting societal values (Giddens 1991) and in the move toward more effective and cost efficient structures (Lawton 1994) and accountability (Newman, King & Rigdon 1997).

Insofar as effectiveness, efficiency and accountability are concerned, these changes are reflected in the reduction in the number of schools and in the geographic distribution of education institutions across North America. Schools were first consolidated, then regionalized such that small, locally operated community schools have largely disappeared from our urban and rural landscapes. Except in the more inaccessible sections of the countryside, small community schools with all or the majority of grades in one building have now been replaced by larger, more economically feasible structures in which students are exposed to a wide range of courses and services not available in the smaller institutions. In many cases, however, the size of these schools and the likelihood that students have to travel to attend them increases the possibility of only superficial contact between the immediate local communities and their schools (Goodlad 1984).

Along with the disappearance of these schools, community control of education also shifted from local boards responsible for one or a few schools to large regional districts administering different types of institutions, often geographically dispersed and in very different demographic and socio-economic contexts. In the past two years, the government of Nova Scotia has reduced its 22 school districts to 6 and in New Brunswick, the 18 school boards have been eliminated entirely. As a result, educational decisions affecting many communities are left to appointed administrators or elected representatives who may or may not have any ties to the

[1] All names have been altered. The codes used are: ERM = Parent; T = teacher; P = principal.

areas that they serve nor have an understanding of the gravity of the issues affecting the communities for which they are responsible.

One means by which governments have tried to reconnect communities and parents with schools has been the creation of some type and degree of site-based management involving an advisory or actual decision-making council structure. While the operational definition and characteristics of site based management vary among jurisdictions, the key component in all suggests that at least some of the decisions formerly made centrally are downloaded to the school level. Through a participatory decision-making process, site councils assume the delegated responsibility for establishing the school's educational direction and for making decisions based on the needs of the students. To do so, these councils may be selected from one or more of the various stakeholder groups in some combination of parents, teachers, students, community members and/or the principal. Ideally, this places the responsibility for decisions among the people who have the most contextual knowledge required to make accurate decisions, who have a vested interest in and concern for the outcome of these decisions, and who ought to be working together to serve better the needs of students.

However, effective decentralized governance which might potentially lead to community control, or at least involvement, in their schools and to improved student achievement can not be implemented merely with the stroke of a legislator's pen (Bullock &Thomas 1997). Although researchers have found little empirical evidence to suggest that decentralization impacts positively on student outcomes (Beck & Murphy, 1996; Leithwood & Menzies 1996), reconnecting schools with their communities by increased stakeholder involvement has been used by governments and advocacy groups as the rationale for implementing this means of governance. While arguments for changes in governance are well known and have been used when justifying restructuring initiatives, several important issues affecting a positive devolution of authority to local bodies are either ignored or dismissed. Two of the most important are the need by communities to reconstruct the idea of what schools ought to be and to redefine the roles of all stakeholders. These issues, however, have to be addressed by those contemplating any form of site-based decision making, whether it is the creation of a new charter school or the development of an advisory council in an existing school.

This paper focuses on one community in Nova Scotia and the core group of parents and teachers devoted to maintaining their school's existence in the face of the centralization of

services. In their efforts to save their school from downsizing or even closure, not only did they have to redefine their roles within the school, but also they had to break down long-standing barriers to community involvement and to reforge some of the ties between home and school which had been let lapse. This led them to clarify their assumptions about education, to become informed on the trends, and to re-examine the potential negative implications for their community if the status quo were to be maintained.

Background and Method of the Nova Scotia Study

In the spring of 1994, the Nova Scotia government passed legislation (Bill 104) allowing for the creation of school councils. As an outgrowth of this legislation, the government announced a call for submissions from schools to pilot the implementation of site-based management (SBM). Each of the eight schools selected received grants of $20,000(CAN) in the first year and $10,000(CAN) in the second to facilitate the implementation process, a process designated to begin in earnest in the fall of 1994. A government provision in the initiative called for an evaluation of each pilot's progress.

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) became concerned in October 1994 when the government did not appear to be moving toward investigating and evaluating or even just documenting the process each of the eight sites used to implement their proposals. NSTU's concern stemmed from the fact that the government had plans to expand SBM to include all schools in the province. The Union believed that by not examining the implementation of SBM in the pilots, the government could be missing an excellent opportunity to adapt the concept of SBM to the Nova Scotia context. As a result of this concern, NSTU contacted several universities in the province and asked for proposed topics for investigation from interested researchers along with an indication of each researcher's area of expertise. From this group, eight of us from four universities were selected in the fall of 1994 and allocated a budget of $100,000 (CAN) to be used in a two-year investigation of SBM in the eight pilot sites.

The data presented here have been derived from several sources, including archival material (minutes of the school council, the proposal submitted to the government, the strategic plan and the Memorandum of Agreement), interviews and informal discussions with parent members of the advisory council. Visitation of the school occurred over the two-year period for purposes of explaining the research project (one with school personnel and another with council

members), to conduct the interviews (three trips) and to attend the public meeting at which the strategic plan was presented. During the same period, informal discussions took place through such means as telephone conversations, conferences attendance and personal communication with participants.

Issues of potential bias or influence arose early, especially considering that funding for the research came from the NSTU. Prior to beginning, the research team discussed this problem with the NSTU coordinator in charge of the project, sought and got agreement from the NSTU that the data would not be used for political reasons, and that the conclusions reached would be those of the research team and not subject to alteration. This arrangement has worked well to address the concerns of the various groups including parents.

We had to settle various issues of access and to clarify for the schools what our position would be in the process of their implementation of SBM. In the second year of the pilots, these issues were of less importance due to other, more immediate problems created by the government's amalgamation of school boards and the institution of advisory councils in the new Education Act. These actions by the government presented some serious problems for us in that the government did not appear to be concerned with what the pilots had experienced; they hired outside contract people to import strategies to establish advisory councils not necessarily based on the experience of the eight pilot schools. For the pilots, this was disconcerting since they had understood that their efforts would help to inform the legislation. The government's apparent lessening interest in the projects became evident at a conference in February, 1996 when the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture presented the participating schools with plaques and thanked them for their efforts, without indicating whether they would be part of any further discussions about SBM in the province.

Sannox Consolidated School: The School and Community Context

Approximately one-quarter of schools in Nova Scotia serve rural areas. As elsewhere in the province, the rural population served by Sannox Consolidated School (SCS) derives much of their livelihood from primary industries and the provision of service to these industries. The disappearance of marine resources and the downsizing of the economy have led to a general move toward out-migration from the area. In recent years, several cost cutting measures in education have been and are being discussed, including the further consolidation of schools, the

sharing of in-school administration, and the regionalization of secondary education. With these discussions has come a feeling of insecurity among teachers, students and parents about the future of SCS.

Officially opened in October 1946, the focus of Sannox Consolidated School had been and continues to be on operating as a community school with students attending from Kindergarten to 12 grade in the one building. Although the original structure was demolished when it no longer met building codes, those sections added to it during periods of expanding student populations remained and were refurbished, thus giving a sense of continuity and tradition to the school. These external changes were coupled with internal modifications when students' needs changed (e.g., an internal wheelchair access ramp has been added and some rooms have now been refurbished for specific purposes).

Declining enrollments, rising operating costs, provincial financial constraint and the movement toward consolidation contributed to the sense of unease about the future of SCS. With a resultant drop of four in the teacher allocation (see Table One below), the viability of the high school program came into question.

Table One: Enrollment and Teacher Allocation for SCS

Year	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997
Students	353	335	315	324
Teachers	21.5	19.5	18	17.5

Not indicated here are the changes in the administration, knowledge of which is important to understand the context for the council. In 1993-1994 and 1994-1995, the school had both a principal and vice-principal, each with a set of responsibilities. In 1995-1996, the school board appointed a sub-system administrator over a "family" or geographical grouping of schools including SCS, and removed the vice-principal's position from its allocation of staff. The duties previously carried out by the vice-principal had to be assumed by the principal along

with his own and with those additional responsibilities necessary for the school's continuing involvement in piloting site-based management.

Parental involvement in SCS as in other Nova Scotia schools was well-ordered into tradition patterns and focussed on participation in one of two groups with well-established roles vis-à-vis the school. One (The Home and School Association or H&S) was a parent-teacher organization predominantly concerned with fund raising and with providing support for the school's various extra-curricular activities. The other group (trustees) were legally constituted under the Education Act and lobbied the school district on behalf of SCS, but it was often seen as an outdated organization or a forum for more radical elements within the community. Other types of communication and contact were regulated and timed according to the policies concerning reporting of student progress and discipline problems. It was at this point that the government decided to develop eight pilot sites for SBM.

Stage One: Separate Realities

Prior to the development of the pilot, budgetary cutbacks and rumoured changes to the school district's commitment to the K-12 schools caused trustees to become nervous over the potential implications of these changes for SCS. While the community and school appeared to have had a longstanding, amicable relationship based on mutual, but arm's length support, the trustees' suggested actions designed to address SCS's future would have altered this relationship by their becoming more involved in or by having more influence on all aspects of SCS's operation.

Teachers

Although teachers and parents had a history of working together, the parameters under which this collaboration took place seemed to have been set by the teachers and by tradition. With the uncertainty surrounding the school's status as a community school, parents and parent groups began to alter the parameters governing teacher-parent interaction based on the assumption that their actions would be supported by the teaching staff. When these assumptions came into the open, this resulted in antagonism when parents made negative comments about the teaching profession, in general, and the rights and benefits won by unions which they saw as impediments to continuing the school as presently structured.

The parents' attack on the only protection that teachers had for guaranteed continuing employment in the face of SCS's closure caused teachers to be antagonistic to the pilot and its parental involvement in their school. While they might have agreed with the need to maintain SCS, they did not agree with the way in which parents assumed that teachers would be willing to jeopardize their income.

> Some of them believe the teachers' union should be done away with. Some of them believe the teachers are making too much money and one of those parents that were all for the council was one of those that I'm talking about. [T50]

The possibility of starting to work on a pilot instituting SBM with such a set of negative preconceptions held by influential parents concerned teachers. If parents with such strong beliefs gained control of the council, then teachers envisioned a school administered by parents who did not appreciate the professional staff. Teachers resented these vocal parents who did not have professional training or experience in education, but who were prepared to make curricular and contractual decisions. As one teacher stated, "I don't mind people making suggestions, but I don't like always being told what to do. [T48]"

Parents

Parents wanted to keep their children at SCS instead of having to transport them 30 minutes down the road to the next larger school which could accommodate all students from the area. While one aspect of the issue was keeping students in the community for education, another aspect was the fear of losing one of the central foci of the community.

> When we started out, everyone thought we had to maintain the kindergarten to 12 school environment and I guess that's important because it is a local community school and in the community such as Sannox, that's a real focus in the community, is the school. Everything seems to hinge on the school and the church environment. [ERM25-2]

Both teachers and parents wanted the school to survive. Whereas teachers wanted to preserve the status quo of interactions and community involvement, parents believed in the need for them to have greater input and decision making responsibilities as the means to save the school from being downsized or closed. For them, a combined effort was necessary, not just for saving the school, but also for the preservation of the community for which the school was a symbolic focal point.

> I got involved with the school council because I've always been interested in what goes on in our school. I'm a parent. My two boys go here and it seemed an opportunity to use our resources to try to save our school and community. [ERM26-1]

The Proposal

Discussions about the need for SCS to continue as a community school had been ongoing for several years, therefore, the opportunity to take control of their school, a prospect presented by the call for proposals, was very attractive to the more active and concerned parents. However, the government's time frame for proposals to be submitted left little opportunity for full and extensive participation of all stakeholders in the writing process. For this reason, the principal, some parents active in the two groups and three or four teachers decided to work together to develop and draft the initial proposal and to submit it in its final form in May, 1994. The translation and implementation of the proposal as accepted by the school board and the government, however, fell to the new principal appointed after the proposal's acceptance and to parents and teachers who had not necessarily been involved in its development or aware of its full details.

When all teachers had the opportunity to view the draft, some aspects incorporated in it created difficulty for them. One problem area had to do with a statement describing the teachers' role in the site-based management model to be implemented. It had a list of responsibilities in which is stated "teachers must give up (if present) adversarial role with administration, parents, etc.,..." and to have "greater time commitment (p. 8)." Although the latter part of this list is the same for parents, this segment is not included, even though one influential parent at a public meeting a few months previously had suggested quite aggressively that teachers cut their salaries by 10% to keep the school open. This aspect of the proposal caused teachers to express concern about the confrontational nature of the statement and its insinuation that teachers had been adversarial to parents' wishes in the past. For teachers, if the council were to be composed of a majority of parents, then the potentially negative environment created by the proposal would have ramifications for teacher-parent relations. This was a particular concern when teachers considered that the vocal and active parents did not necessarily represent the majority. As one teacher said:

> Too much power centralized by certain ones that are very vocal and there's nothing wrong with that but it would be nice to see some of the other parents see it so then you would certainly get them to see the school, what it's all about rather than the negative view when they're having problems with their child whenever it is. [T49]

In response, teachers lobbied for equal representation of parents and teachers; teachers could help parents to understand their point of view and parents could communicate their concerns to teachers. At the meeting discussing the proposal, teachers succeeded in obtaining from all parties an agreement that the advisory council would be chosen, not appointed, at a public meeting. As well, teachers requested that four conditions be added in the Preamble, the first and most important of which is "That all contracts, local and provincial, will be adhered to (p. i)." Once the changes to the proposed composition of the advisory council became part of the document along with the clarifying Preamble, the staff voted 60% in favor of supporting the proposal. Ironically, parents on the council stated that contracts and issues of concern for teachers were not areas in which they wanted to work.

Teachers' reactions may have also been prompted by changes in the principal's role and in the role of the school board. First, in the proposal, the principal became the key individual in the operation of the school under site-based management. While continuing in the role of instructional leader, the proposal stated that the principal would also have, in addition, "added authority and accountability" and be "willing to sacrifice huge amounts of personal time (p. 8)." In effect, the principal, as described in this submission, would have broad authority, with the school council giving advice only.

Second, instead of the school district being in control of the school, the writers proposed an alteration of the district's and superintendent's responsibilities to those of support for the school's efforts, of sharing their power and of providing advice through consultation. The principal, with guidance from the school council, would then assume many of the budgetary and curricular functions currently housed at the district level. The legal implications of such proposed changes were not clear.

After the initial acceptance of the proposal, several changes took place, including the appointment of a new principal. With the designation of SCS as a pilot school and with the

appointment of the new principal, the stakeholders looked forward with some tentativeness to the establishment of its first council.

Stage Two: Cautious Cooperation

> I think that this is the only project that really came from the community rather than from a school initiative or a staff-initiated council. So I think there was some concern from the administration and teachers that maybe they were losing something, that their rights were being infringed upon, so they were looking for some kind of control mechanism. That wasn't the case at all, but it took a long time to get the message through to them, to build up trust. [ERM25]

During discussions in the spring prior to the government's call or proposals, differences of opinion about how to maintain SCS as a K-12 school had occurred between parents and teachers. With the subsequent approval for the proposal granted by the provincial government, parents and teachers had to come together to develop the council structure. From a position of initial wariness and even antagonism, both groups had to explain their conception of the place of the school in the community and of the roles of the various stakeholder groups in education, and had to discuss the council's role in helping to preserve the school's existence. The development of a shared understanding of the community-school relationship and of a vision of SCS's future took time. The first real efforts began tentatively with the first public meeting called to shape and to elect the council.

Coupled with this wariness was a change in leadership, a loss of teaching personnel and the introduction of multi-age grouping in the elementary grades about which some teachers and parents expressed their concerns. It was in this charged atmosphere that in October, 1994, the first general meeting of parents and school staff was held to design the council and to nominate representatives from the various groups.

Under the guidance of an experienced workshop animator, the attendees were split into working groups to decide on the composition and number of council members. The consensus reached determined that the council would serve for two years and would be composed of 14 people including 5 parents, 5 teachers, 2 students, 1 support person and the principal. The actual council membership came from people either volunteering their services or being nominated. Since the parents involved had direct connections with the trustees and the H&S, these

organizations believed that they had access to council deliberations, had the opportunity to give input when necessary and did not see the need to press for formal representation.

One of the first decisions made by the council was to function by consensus. During their initial discussions, they decided to spend the first year creating a strategic plan, part of the effort to be devoted to developing among the stakeholders trust and a common understanding about the operation of the council. By the end of the first three months, a positive working relationship had been developed among council members. To aid in the building of trust, the membership decided not to have its meetings open to the public, but relied on the minutes and the representatives from the stakeholder groups to communicate the substance and outcomes of deliberations. By keeping the attendance restricted to members, the council hoped that they would be able to have frank and open discussions while they wrestled with the concept of SBM in their context and with the direction that they should take for the preservation of SCS as a community school. They believed that the statements of position and resolution of differences needed to develop a common understanding of purpose and vision (Fullan 1993) would have been interpreted as insurmountable differences and served only to allow others with a very confrontation type of agenda to prevent the council from achieving its goals.

> I don't think it would have been very beneficial for us to have public meetings because we were kind of finding each other out or feeling each other out as a group. Not for the sake of secrecy, but for the sake of clarity, organization. Or if I was a member of the public sitting in on one of our meetings, I probably would have been just as or more confused than anything else because it seemed to take "x" amount of meetings before we were able to organize ourselves sufficiently to come to any kind of [idea] of where we were or where we're going to go. [ERM24-2]

These sessions were a calculated risk: by excluding people from the discussions, the interpretation of action through rumor, gossip and innuendo could have caused irreparable divisions to occur among the council members, and between the community and staff members. The principal recognized this problem.

> Through this past year where we operated in a vacuum, *in camera*,... I think people were concerned about what we were doing and how we were doing it and wary and we weren't telling many people. We weren't doing anything behind

> anybody's back, but I think there is some, there maybe even some apprehension on all stakeholders' parts that we have this group that has a plan. [P]

Teachers not on council may have felt excluded from the discussions, but they recognized the need for the council to achieve a working relationship.

> It seems to have taken quite a while or a number of meetings even before (the council members that are there now) before the community [members] and the teachers on council kind of saw eye to eye, so to speak, and saw where each person was coming from. [T51]

The decision to focus on trying to understand the implications of SBM and on developing a strategic plan during the first year paid off in that the relationship among the various stakeholder groups improved. However, to some extent, the *incamera* sessions may have contributed to some individuals' confusion about the role of SBM in their school and the source of some initiatives.

> Some people have problems with things such as multiage grouping and semestering, and tend to attribute them to SBM. The thing is, it's hard to tell if they are attributable to SBM or just something that we needed to sustain ourselves with anyway. Everything's been so compacted in terms of different innovations which have come forth that there's been a confusion and a blurring of lines. [ERM27]

Throughout this first year, the council met regularly and, as the completion of the strategic plan neared, this often meant twice a week. Generally, the amount of time members devoted to council business varied. While the principal stated that he spent, on average, about one-half of his time in preparation for or following up on activities as a result of meetings, the estimates of other council members varied from 6 to 7 hours per week to 5 to 6 hours per month. Although quorum did not appear to be an issue at these meetings, full parental attendance was difficult due to family and work commitments whereas this did not appear to be the case for teacher members.

At the end of the first year, the council held a public meeting at which they presented their strategic plan to the stakeholders. During this presentation, council members acted as a group, with no discernable differences between parents and teachers in evidence. At the time of

presentation, however, SCS again faced the potential of budgetary cutbacks, staff cuts and a reorganization of the school district.

Stage Three: Shared Action

For both parents and teachers, the experience served to remove some of the barriers to understanding of each other's desires for SCS, and to normalizing the involvement of the community in the education of its children. It also helped to develop among both parents and teachers an appreciation for the educational concerns of the other group and served to expose their erroneous assumptions about the workload and role of each in the education of SCS's students.

Teachers

Although most of the teachers lived in or near the community, they did not have a means to address the general educational concerns of the community and parents. With the formal development of a council and its involvement in governance issues,

> I would say we're probably much more aware of the community's interest. I think we've always been supported by it, but now that there's a body in place that discusses these things, I think anything we do we're much more aware of the reaction to it from the community. [T47]

This awareness translated not only into a better understanding by teachers of the community's wishes, but also into an increased involvement by parents in the school and in the education process of their students.

> At least you have the parents coming into the school now and like last year, we had a volunteer list and parents came in and volunteered. So I would say that site based had a part in that. [T53]

Through parental involvement in governance issues, teachers had an avenue to discuss their concerns about the school and discovered that the apparently extreme position that they perceived some parents to have taken vis-a-vis their contracts was not shared by eveyone. Further, they were able to demonstrate fully the complexity of their work and the extent of their workload, and to remove misconceptions about teaching held by the community.

> I've heard a member of the team who is a parent say "I didn't believe all of the work involved in setting up programs and even, like, getting the semestering down, making sure that the students have these courses and that." She just didn't realize the behind the scenes work. [T48]

Parents

Previously, parents felt frozen out of educational issues with little or no access to teaching staff, especially not through any of the formal channels in existence prior to SBM and the council. At least to some extent, parents appreciated the opportunity to have a forum through which issues could be addressed regularly. The council allowed parents to place their previous efforts for the preservation of SCS in context and to show teachers that they were attempting to support the school, regardless of how their actions had been interpreted.

> When we were trustees and Home and School, there was not a lot of teacher involvement with either of those groups. Now they see some of the things we've been doing in the past and they see how we've worked and worked diligently to maintain what we had and we were working for the students and for the school. [ERM27-8]

As was mentioned above, the initial meetings of the council were designed to develop a common understanding and to address at least some of the former antagonisms between parents and teachers.

> Once the teachers on the council learned that the parents on council weren't totally radical, things smoothed over a bit. Yeah, I think they didn't know what we wanted. [ERM26-6]

Once the working relationship had developed, teachers and parents awoke to the severity of the external threats to the continued survival of SCS and to the urgent necessity of pooling resources to address these external threats.

> Each time we go one step further. It's one of not complete agreement but [after] each and every time you meet or [after] each and every item, it's more of a consensual thing where you are dealing with the situation as best you can and as a unit you know. And it seems to be that as a unit is your best chance for your continued survival. [ERM24-2]

Common Action

External factors strongly influenced how the school council at SCS functioned throughout the second year of its existence, and these factors often appeared to take the initiative away from the council's progress. In the issue of the amalgamation of school boards, for example, the community organizers of two public meetings seemed to act independently of the council and did not ask the council to take a leadership role, even though what governed council's discussions, to a large extent, had been "the survival of Sannox. [ERM12]"

During the second year, the SCS council faced administrative uncertainty, school district amalgamation, possible closure and downsizing, council restructuring due to new legislation, and continuing budgetary constraint. Within this changing context, the council continued to work together on trying to understand their role and on implementing their strategic plan. To do this meant that the council often took care to try to understand the trends and the actions in order to be proactive instead of reactive.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sannox Consolidated School had existed in the community for 50 years without a serious threat to its existence or a questioning of its place in the community. During that time, parents and teachers had developed a tacit understanding of each others' roles in the education process, roles which appeared to be complementary and separate, with little interference from either group in how these roles were carried out. With the threats to SCS's existence and the potential removal of education from Sannox, however, these roles and the assumptions behind them came under scrutiny.

Separate Realities

For most parents, SCS was a keystone in the preservation of the community as they believed that once students left to attend schools elsewhere, their attention to possibilities for work would also be elsewhere. The preservation of the school, then, became a central focus for the efforts of the trustees and the H&S. One logical suggestion, at least to the trustees, was to ask teachers to make a sacrifice by working for less money and by negotiating to alter the contract in the area of working conditions, conditions perceived by some parents to be impediments to saving SCS.

The relationship between some key elements of the community and the professional staff, then, was strained at the beginning of the process of the writing the proposal. The underlying

source of the strain revolved around the changing role parents would take in the administration of the school, and the attendant potential influence on areas not previously under the control of the local community, at least not within recent memory. Although the community had supported the school previously, they had not been involved in its detailed management, nor did they realize the depths of problems facing the school from the government and school district.

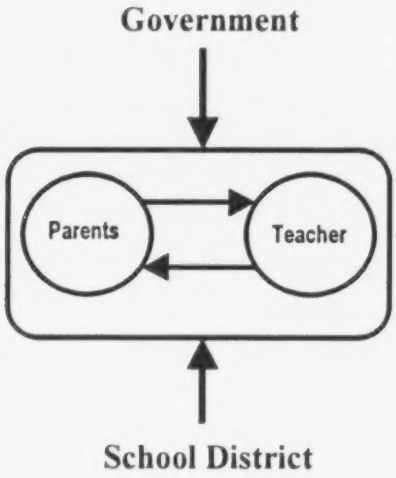

Figure 1: Separate Realities

Common Action

Once the council began to discuss the issues surrounding maintaining education in Sannox, council members soon realized that they had common ground for discussion which led to a more in-depth understanding between all parents and teachers of issues that they both faced. This understanding became communicated to the wider community of the school, thus providing an opportunity for parents and staff to understand each other and to learn that both had quite similar goals for SCS. As for participating on the council, parents particularly appreciated the opportunity to become involved and appreciated new insights into the SCS's operation.

One major achievement was the development of a strategic plan in which the aspirations of parents and teachers were embodied. In it, the role of the school in the community was redefined, goals were set and actions for implementing these put into place. In effect, this plan allowed the council to focus and to clarify its efforts and to communicate to the stakeholder groups and to the school board the direction they wished for their school. This plan also

provided a blueprint for action when discussing SCS's future with the new school district administrators. In effect, the council caused parents and teachers to develop a basis for understanding and common purpose. With these came a focus on common actions that they could take against external agencies threatening SCS, even when they still had not resolved some issues between the community and the school staff.

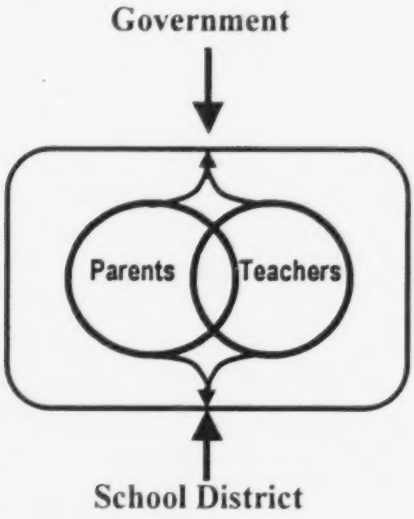

Figure 2: Common Action

All stakeholders realized, then, that SCS's role as a K-12 community school had been in jeopardy for several years and were prepared to examine collectively how they could continue to keep this important institution within their community. The balance of the second year focused on consolidating their achievements, on making representation to the hearings establishing a new, amalgamated school district structure, and then later on, fighting for the very survival of SCS. In response to these changes, parents and teachers, using their new-found understanding of each other's positions, worked in unison instead of dividing their efforts. Although beginning from separate realities, parental involvement in school governance in this instance resulted in concerted action and a rediscovered appreciation of the role that Sannox Consolidated could play in the preservation of their community.

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